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Mary Ellen Waithe ed. A History of Women Philosophers, Volume II: Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment Women Philosophers/ A.D. 500-1600. Dordrecht/ Boston/ London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989. Pp. xxxviii + 349. Cloth, ISBN 90-247-3571-8.

Mary Ellen Waithe, Professor, The University of Minnesota, has put together her second volume in a collection of essays on women philosophers. This particular volume contains studies of seventeen women who wrote philosophical texts in the medieval and Renaissance periods. In addition to serving as the general editor of the text, Waithe authors lengthy chapters on Murasaki Shikibu (970-1031), a Japanese literary writer; on Heloise (1100-?), a French writer on love and friendship; on Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera (1562-?), a Spanish writer in natural philosophy; and a short summary chapter on Roswitha of Gandersheim (c.935-1001), Christine Pisan (1365-?), Margaret More Roper (c. 1506-1544), and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).

Joan Gibson, co-author of the introduction to the text with Waithe, raised some methodological issues of writing about women philosophers who lived during the years 500 to 1600. More specifically, she sought to determine which women could accurately be described as philosophers, since nearly all women were cut off from access to institutional higher education from the beginning of the universities in the 13th century to the seventeenth century. Therefore, they did not have the opportunity to receive formal training in academic philosophy. Giving a very loose criterion of inclusion, she concluded: "These women are not women on the fringes

of philosophy, but philosophers on the fringes of history." (xxxviii)

The chapters on the encyclopedia of Herrad of Hohenbourg (fl.1176) and on the mystical texts of Mechtild of Magdeburg (1207-c. 1282) were written by Joan Gibson. The German author Elisabeth Gossmann wrote on the mystical thought and natural philosophy of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). Cornelia Wolfskeel examined the religious treatises of Beatrice of Nazareth (122-168), Hadewych of Antwerp (fl. 1260), Brigitta of Sweden (1302-1373), and Catherine of Siena (c.1347-1380). Elizabeth N. Evasdaughter contributed a chapter on the English anchoress Julian of Norwich (1342-?); and Beatrice Zedler wrote about Marie le Jars de Gournay (1565-1645).

Each chapter in the text is self contained, so there is no interactive writing among the authors. Consequently, the book reads more like an anthology than a cohesive study of an historical period. However, occasionally the authors refer to an influence that one writer may have had on another writer considered in the text. All chapters give biographical introduction to the woman being considered, use original source material written by the authors, and give a solid general description of the central philosophical themes found in their works. For this reason alone the text can serve as a good introduction to the thought of these authors, particularly because several of their works are not yet available in English.

In addition, most chapters take a particular philosophical area of study to consider in relation to the author. For example, Murasaki is studied from the perspective of the existential import

of her theories, and Hildegard as a philosopher of religion. Heloise's philosophy of love and moral responsibility, Herrad's philosophy of nature, Beatrice's and Mechtild's epistemology of religious experience, and Hadewych's and Brigitta's concepts of God and human nature are all emphasized.

An effort is made by some authors to compare the woman philosopher's theory with those of better known men philosophers. For example, there is a discussion of Julian of Norwich's epistemology in comparison with Duns Scotus and William of Occam, of Catherine of Siena's theory of the freedom of the human will with that of St. Augustine, and of Oliva Sabuco's scepticism with Descartes' methodical doubt.

One evident criticism from anyone familiar with the women writers of the period 500-1600 is that there is a strange selection of authors which leaves some extremely significant women philosophers out of the text while other less significant ones are included. Christine de Pisan, who engaged in systematic philosophical argumentation about many issues, and St. Teresa of Avila, whose writings are the most sophisticated of any woman reflecting on the epistemology of religious experience have significant material that could be discussed in a full chapter rather than a cursory mention at the end of the text. In addition, Lucrezia Marinelli (1571-1653) whose systematic arguments against the Aristotelian view of woman place her high in the ranks of the male philosophers of her time also merits a chapter. Tullia of Aragon (1506-1565) and Isabella Sforza Rossi (1471-1524) and Isotta Nogarola (1418-1466) also bear mention along with the impact of the

Italian Renaissance on women philosophical writers.

A History of Women Philosophers: Volume II constitutes an initial way to organize source material that is not readily available to the English speaking public. Therefore, it would be extremely useful as a text in complement with traditional sources in medieval and Renaissance philosophy or the philosophy of religion. It contains many passages in which women seek to describe in their own words their experience of the self and of God. Its main value is descriptive rather than evaluative, and it has a good bibliography and index for philosophers of religion.

At the same time, there is a lack of consistent rigor of argument by the various authors of the different chapters. There is also no conclusion to the book, which might have been used to integrate the various themes developed in relation to such varied historical philosophers as analyzed by so many different contemporary authors. It is to be hoped that in the third volume of this series, there would be greater attention paid to these methodological considerations. For it is not enough to identify and make available the significant writings of women philosophers. There is also an equally important contemporary demand for intensive philosophical scrutiny of these writer's thoughts.

To summarize then, even with the methodological limitations just mentioned, the second volume of A History of Women Philosophers is a significant text for the beginning of this new field of research. It will serve as an important resource for libraries, scholars, and students in the areas mentioned above. In addition, it will call for further rigorous study by those who

discover in it new authors worthy of consideration.

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